Fifteenth of the Series of Sunday Times Stories BY BEATRICE FAIRFAX

The Final Adventure
The Watch That Told Secrets

DOROTHY DANE knew all about the faithlessness of men! They were perfidious creatures who "loved and rode away," or "kissed and told." You held them by keeping them uncertain as to whether or not you wished to hold them. Particularly did the city man woo the country girl to her undying regret—for he always tired of her simple uncalculating charm.

Oh, yes, Dorothy considered herself wise concerning the wiles of men. And then, when she was nineteen and in the flower of her delicate beauty she met Clinton Harding.

Harding was as typical of the city as was Dorothy of her little fishing village—provided always you believe human beings may be considered as types. He wore his loose-fitting corduroys with an air of distinction combined of good tailoring and a good carriage. She wore her gingham dresses with an untutored simplicity which made up for their lack of fit and line.

From the moment he met the pretty, barefooted fisher girl, Harding was interested. Dorothy responded shyly as to manner, but very frankly as to the glow of tenderness in her eyes. Step by step their wooing proceeded, as is ever the way of youth. Harding said nothing definite, but Dorothy half guessed all he meant and all she desired him to mean.

If Donald Dane, Dorothy's uncle and guardian, noticed the tremulous eagerness with which the girl rose to meet each day, he said nothing. He had concerns of his own which busied him far more than wondering if the city chap meant well by Dorothy or not.

One afternoon the particular moment which a story writer must seize upon in trying to show a cross section of life overtook the girl and her uncle. Dorothy was climbing about the rocks waiting for the happy daily accident which should bring Harding upon the scene. And presently Harding, playing his part in nature's little drama, appeared.

Eagerly the girl waved to her undeclared lover. Emotion in full tide was running out from heart to heart, ready to sweep both into the flow of life and love. The boy and girl sat down on a rock and looked out over the glittering beauty of the water.

Below the cliffs where the young lovers sat there was a heavy growth of bushes, and back of one green clump of verdure there was a cave a few feet above the waterline. While the drama of life and love was being played on the cliffs above, another drama—world old, too—was being enacted down on the sand where the bushes grew. For suddenly the green growth parted and a man peered out. In his hand he held a small mirror and with it he flashed a signal by heliograph.

The Signal Flashes.

Far out on the green water, tinted to light by the sun, a sailing schooner rode at ease. Two sailors at the railing caught the repeated flash of the heliograph. They turned and summoned their captain and presently he came to the deck and began reading and transcribing the signal of that little heliograph.

The message was this—no more. "Tonight at 12."

In complete understanding the captain and his men smiled at each other. A few rapid arrangements were made, then the message was destroyed and presently a white pennant was bound to a rope and run up the masthead.

The man in the bushes at the foot of the cliffs where Donald and Dorothy sat so happily, was sweeping the far horizon with a pair of strong binoculars. At last they caught the sailing schooner in their range and focused on it. A little bit of white ran up a rope and came at last to sway gently on the topmast. The man behind the binoculars smiled with satisfaction. Then he stepped back. The bushes closed about him and the opening of the cave was hidden.

At the top of the cliff sat Donald and Dorothy. His arm was about her and she was resting quietly in its circle. Neither spoke.

And then over the cliff came Donald Dane, Dorothy's uncle. The boy and the girl started to their feet. Dorothy was frightened, wondering what explanation her uncle would demand. Harding was suddenly aware of the fact that he had circled Dorothy with his arm, but had not taken her into his arms, nor kissed her, nor said he loved her. He wondered suddenly what he meant by it all—what he could tell the girl's uncle that he meant.

But Donald Dane asked no questions. Indeed, he seemed hardly aware of the little drama enacting itself before his eyes. For he was thinking of another drama—the drama whose stage had been set by his heliograph message and the answering white flag on the sailing schooner—the drama to be enacted "Tonight at Twelve."

Donald Dane's cottage was typical of Smith Harbor, the little fishing village where all of Dorothy's short youth had been spent. Her home was a small frame building, a cross between a houseboat and a factory-town shanty. It was painted white and had tiny windows, which looked like portholes.

Back of the house was an old-fashioned, stone-curbed well, whose suspended bucket hung from a rope tinted with soft moss.

Dorothy's home was primitive and of the sea. Its clean freshness made up for its poverty. To Harding it suddenly seemed a haven of refuge against his own thoughts. But Dorothy shamefacedly remembered the board walls, decorated with seaweed and starfish and hung with nets.

"Go in and get the supper, Dorothy, girl," ordered her uncle. "Mr. Harding and I will sit outside and light a pipe."

Dorothy hurried to her own little room eagerly. Presently she came out dressed in a clean white duck skirt and middy blouse. She pirouetted about for a moment with a self-conscious joy of looking her prettiest. Then she covered her finery with a pink checked apron and set about laying the table.

He Cannot Come.

At last everything was ready and Dorothy hurried over to the door to call her guests.

"Supper's ready. Uncle, will you get us some nice fresh water from the well, please—and then come right in."

"Sorry, Miss Dorothy. I didn't know you were counting on me. I've got to hurry right over to the hotel and get off some letters before the uptrain goes. My mail for the city has to get out tonight."

A more finished coquette than Dorothy might have poutingly suggested that he could write his letters there directly supper was finished. But the little maiden of the fishing village looked upon all men as superior beings whose will must not be too greatly questioned.

So she came out to the doorstep to bid Harding good-by. Uncle Donald carried his bucket full of water into the house, and either chance or design or carelessness, or both, made him close the door after him.

"Are you sorry I must go—dear?" asked Harding.

And Harding stooped quickly and pressed his lips to hers. Soft and young. Dorothy's mouth trembled against his own—acquiescent, eager. He caught her to him for a moment, and then he fairly pushed her away and hurried off.

And beside the doorway of the Dane cottage, where the unused oars were leaning, there stood his shotgun, forgotten for the time.

Dorothy stood and watched him go. The tremor of her own heart was delicious to her. The clamor of her blood fairly frightened her. She ran to the old-fashioned well and drew up a bucket of cool water.

First, she drank eagerly, as if burning with a thirst she could hardly assuage. Then she bathed her face and her wrists, and stood smiling happily into the sunset.

For a moment she stood, yielding herself to happy dreams. Forgotten were all the romances she had carried from the Cedar Point Library station! She had no memory of the faithlessness of man nor of how he "loved and rode away" or "kissed and told." She only knew that she loved Clinton Harding and that when he kissed her her heart and soul had gone in triumph to her lips to meet his demand.

She loved him. And he had kissed her. Dorothy was very happy and not at all afraid of the awakening her reading had taught her to believe followed love's dreaming.

"Dorothy—what are you mooning out there for?" called her Uncle's insistent voice. "This striped seabass ain't going to get any better by bein' cold!"

So Dorothy left her dreaming of the man she loved and went in to wait upon the man who could make the demands of relationship upon her.

She thought Clinton Harding would surely return that night to tell her what her kiss had meant to him. But he did not come. And the next day passed—and still he did not come.

First wonder, then pain, then doubt held Dorothy in their grip. She was going through the world old tragedy of the woman who gives devotion when man has only wanted a little diversion.

It was an ordinary enough tragedy—but that made Dorothy's pain none the less. She was miserably unhappy. There was no one to help her, no one to care. She bore her pain in silence as long as she could—and then she acted.

"Well, Beatrice, what particular thriller is filling your starry eyes with wonder this morning?" asked Jimmy.

"Oh, you'd never understand. I was thinking about the faithlessness of men," said I. "And that's a subject where your sympathy is bound to lie on the wrong side. You shan't see this letter."

Jimmi fairly seized it from my hand and read it aloud in a burlesque tone, which brought a tinge of sadness to my heart:

"Smith Harbor, Long Island.

"Dear Miss Fairfax:

"I am a country girl and in love with a young man from New York who has been staying here. Last night he kissed me. Now he has gone without a word. What shall I do? DOROTHY DANE."

Jimmy looked at me with an air of focusing his attention on some one or some thing he couldn't quite see.

"Smith Harbor!" he said. "Smith Harbor. Say I've got to call John Martin, of the United States revenue department, on your phone. I was trying to get a story from him this morning—there's a suspicion in the inner circles that there's a little smuggling going on down on Long Island. I went to Martin this morning after a story—but I didn't get it.

"He's got one of his best men down at Smith harbor looking into the matter and he's promised me that as soon as the chap reports he'll have a story for me. Now I'm wondering if I have a story for him. Mind if I call him up?"

A Suggestion.

Of course I didn't mind a bit. And presently Jimmy was asking eagerly of someone at the other end if Smith harbor was the place where his man was staying. Jimmy smiled with the tense excitement he always shows when his detective and newspaper instinct are working happily together hand in hand.

Then he turned to me. "Permit me to reread your leter, Miss Fairfax. It begins to seem to me that I have a great deal of sympathy for your fisher maiden . . . Um—yes. Suppose you go and see her. I'll come down later."

"But this isn't a very urgent case. I can't accomplish much by going to see her. Besides I haven't gone all through my mail and there may be women who need me far more than Dorothy Dane does," said I.

"Beatrice Fairfax, how many city men do you suppose are staying in that God-forsaken spot known as Smith harbor about now. It's a bunch of tumbledown shanties and smelly fishing shacks and yellow sand and cliffs eaten into by the tide. There's nothing summer-resorty or alluring about Smith harbor.

"Your girl writes that she's in love with a city chap who disappeared after he kissed her without coming back for more. My man Martin says that his man, Harding, is down at Smith harbor looking for smugglers and hasn't reported for twenty-four hours.

"Now smugglers are not a particularly polite and moderate crew. If Harding has disappeared, it may be that his bruised and battered body is lying at the foot of a cliff, or forty fathoms deep with heavy leads to weight him down. I vote to go down and see. How do you vote?"

I voted just as Jimmy wanted me to. That is, I agreed to go down to Smith Harbor.

When Clinton Harding left Dorothy Dane to her maiden meditations on her first kiss, he hurried off in a frame of mind almost as exalted as hers. It wasn't his first kiss, by any means; but it was his first real one.

He knew that Dorothy meant something to him that none of the girls he had thought he cared for in his city life had ever remotely suggested to his heart or mind or senses.

He had worked at odd jobs—selling papers, blacking boots, vending peanuts, and at last good fortune had brought John Martin, of the revenue service, across his path. At sixteen Harding went to work for Martin as an errand boy. Now at twenty-four he was the chief's first assistant.

Gratitude a Factor.

Gratitude was one of the largest factors in Harding's generous nature. His first kiss must be temporarily forgotten while he went to pay the allegiance due his first friend.

With the memory of Dorothy's gentian-blue eyes and trembling red lips tucked tenderly away in a corner of his heart, Harding hurried down to the hotel and set about writing a letter to his chief. It was brief and bore his message clearly:

"Dear Martin—Nothing suspicious here. Wire instructions. Will do whatever you say, for I don't want to fall down on the job that you've given me. Feeling fine; hope you are, too. Sincerely,

"CLINTON HARDING."

It was not in Harding's nature to express himself in words. Martin must know that he was a sincere and grateful friend—and Dorothy must guess that she was truly beloved.

Again he saw the cottage where he had left her standing, and suddenly a queer detail obtruded itself on his mind. It was a memory of the gun he had left leaning against the white-washed walls. He must have that gun. Harding got up, took his hat, blew out the lamp, which was the primitive means of lighting rooms in the Smith Harbor House, and went to fetch his gun.

Now Dorothy, her heart still aglow with tenderness, was even then lighting her candle and bidding good night to her uncle. The girl went into her room and closed her door that she might be alone with her dreams. And Donald Dane loked at his watch, lighted his pipe and waited.

When the hands of Donald Dane's watch united in a straight line over the figure twelve, he rose, put out the lamp in his living room and went out to the steps of his cottage. Quietly and with infinite caution he closed the door after him. Then he put his hands to his lips and whistled.

From the shades back of the house two men approached. They walked with the rolling gait of the sailor. For a moment they joined Dane at the doorway and after whispered instructions the three hurried over to the old-fashioned stone curbed well.

Dane seized upon the rope from which the bucket was suspended, stepped over the coping and slid down into the darkness below. A second man followed him and then the third sailor climbed over in turn.

Just at that moment Clinton Harding came up the road to the Dane cottage. He picked up his gun and turned to go. Then the creek of a windlass came to him through the silence. He looked about him alertly, suspiciously. The sound came from the rear of the cottage.

Quietly, Harding took a step or two in that direction; and he saw a man's head disappearing over the stone coping of the wall. He stood still a moment reviewing the situation, and after that he moved quietly toward the well. There he hesitated for a moment, and then, dropping his gun in the grass, he seized upon the rope and descended fearlessly to whatever waited him in the unknown blackness.

Half way down he clung for a moment with one hand while he flashed the light of his electric torch into the darkness. A few inches above water level he saw a door cut into the stone of the wall. Through this he felt certain the man he had seen disappearing over the side of the well must have gone.

There was no more hesitancy on Harding's part. He continued going down the rope hand over hand, found the opening in the stone wall and went through it. Directly his feet touched ground he drew a pistol from his hip pocket, and holding it in one hand an electric torch in another he sent a finger of light across the passageway.

He followed the light and came to a wide cave which opened at one end on the passageway to the well, and, as he immediately suspected, out under the cliffs upon the shore and the further end.

A Perilous Feat.

Harding flashed his light across the cave and stood ready.

In the meantime a boat, manned by the two sailors who had answered Dane's heliograph signal that afternoon, was rowing in from the sailing schooner. In it were a number of packing cases guarded by the captain of the steamer, who stood anxiously in the stern gazing out over the ocean receding behind them.

The boat pulled up at the foot of the cliff and from the bushes which guarded the entrance of the cave Donald Dane, followed by his two men, came out to greet the captain. Suddenly the two men with Dane exclaimed anxiously that they had heard a sound in the cave. They hurried back to investigate, while Dane and the captain superintended the unloading of the packing cases and their removal to the cave.

In the inner chamber of the cave the smugglers saw the figure of a man whose business there must portend danger. One of them lifted an arm in which he held a heavy club, and with it he struck. Harding fell face downward, an inert figure, helpless and powerless to betray what he had seen. The smugglers studied him for a moment dispassionately and then returned to their work.

And so two days passed, and Dorothy Dane waited in vain for the return of the man who has kissed and left her. Hourly she grew more restless and unhappy. Was it true that a man like Harding tired of a girl directly he felt sure of her?

I followed Jimmy's suggestion, packed a little handbag and hurried down to Smith Harbor. Directly I arrived there, I took a room at the hotel, and then went to visit the girl whose cry for aid had brought he to her little fishing village.

I found the girl I had come to visit sitting on the doorstep of a tiny cottage. She looked pathetically forlorn and unhappy, but as soon as I came she unburdened herself to me with a dependent air some women have; that of unloading their troubles on your shoulders and ceasing in the process to feel that they have any longer any troubles!

Presently, to the cottage where we were sitting, there came a peddler—a whiskered member of an Oriental race. He was an exotic figure in the quiet streets of that little fishing village. As he came stumbling along with his pack on his back, the country girl showed the interest the inhabitants of rural districts often betray in anything untoward or unexpected.

The man seemed to recognize and appreciate the responsive attitude of the little country girl. At once he put down his pack and with a nice understanding of what would appeal to her, he got out a case of wrist watches. It took little persuasion to make Dorothy put one on.

I had not the heart to interrupt the

NEW WORK FOR HUMANITY

Dear Readers of The Washington Times:

At the suggestion of a wise man I have begun a new kind of work. For years I have written "Advice to the Lovelorn" for the newspapers. I have answered questions of men and women concerning the affairs of their hearts.

Now I am going to do something more exciting than that. With the help of Miss Grace Darling I am going to take some of the most important episodes that come to me through the letters from the millions of readers of "Advice to the Lovelorn," make stories of them for The Washington Times, and Miss Darling and Basil Dickey will turn them into scenarios for motion pictures.

They will be produced as stories in The Times every Sunday, and during the week following the motion pictures will show the acting of the story.

It is so exciting to think of having your thoughts changed into actual moving human beings appearing before the public on the screen.

In my work in collaboration with Miss Darling in the motion pictures I shall try to give good advice, working as always with my one great motto, "Love makes the world go round."

BEATRICE FAIRFAX.

well-curbing, climbed over it, seized upon the rope and so disappeared.

Beatrice Gets Aid.

The peddler came from his place in hiding, smiled with satisfaction, and then hurried down the road and across lots to the top of the cliff, where he waylaid me with the thudding stone and its message that I should phone Martin.

In the corridor of the rickety hotel I found that little instrument that travels to the very outposts of civilization—a telephone. In a few minutes I had New New York, and was talking to the

"IT WILL TELL SECRETS, MY FRIEND," SAID THE PEDDLER.

instinct which probably began when Mother Eve selected the smoothest, freshest fig leaf she could find. But an interruption did occur in a moment, for an elderly man of the seafaring type came up and roughly asked what was going on. Immediately the peddler began displaying his wares and ingratiatingly whined: "Pappa buy a wrist watch."

He took what appeared to be a wrist watch from his case, and even while the man whom Dorothy had addressed as "Uncle" was protesting, the peddler clasped it tightly on Dane's wrist.

The "watch" had a peculiar dial with figures running from a point marked "normal" to one marked "high."

"That won't tell time," said Dane irritably.

"It will tell secrets," smiled the peddler.

Despite his rich, thick gutturals and the foreign accent which suggested Hester street or Oriental shores, I recognized Jimmy's voice.

And now the peddler laughed and, seizing Dane's hand, he studied the instrument he had strapped to it closely while he said: "I sell cheap, because I buy from smugglers."

And rapidly the dial hand crossed to the mark "high."

The instrument Jimmy Barton, in his disguise as a peddler, had strapped to Donald Dane's wrist was an invention called the sphymograph.

But even while the sphymograph betrayed his interest in the word "smuggler," Dane curtly refused to buy anything and fairly ordered the peddler from the place. However, that gentleman gave me a very good price on the wrist watch Dorothy was so loath to part with.

I presented it to her, wondering on whose expense account it would go down later.

After the peddler left, I promised Dorothy to go down to the hotel and make every possible effort to locate her missing lover.

Then I bade the girl good-by and hurried down the road again. I had gone but a short distance when a stone thudded at my feet with a quiet heaviness quite unlike the skipping sound a falling stone is likely to make. It was wrapped in heavy paper. I took this off and in Jimmy's well-known writing I found this message: "Phone Martin. Tell him to look in the well."

I looked up, and there on the face of the cliff was my friend the peddler. He waved a friendly hand and hurried off.

Now, how had Jimmy Barton managed to discover suspicious circumstances in connection with an innocent stone-curbed well?

On his way to the cottage he had stumbled over something lying in the grass near the well. He stooped and discovered a shotgun, on the stock of which the initials C. H. were carved.

When Dane bade him begone he lingered waiting for my departure. He was sure once the master of the house thought the coast clear, some evidence which fitted in with the finding of the gun and the heavily trodden grass would betray itself. And he was right. Directly I had gone, Dane peered about carefully to assure himself that he was unobserved, then crossed over to the flicker of light appeared in the darkness. Donald Dane had come to visit his prisoner.

"Well, Harding, you're a slick boy—but you're dealing with a slicker," he began with a heavy effort at facetiousness. "We've got you hand and foot—bound and helpless. You can see that for yourself. You're not much good to the United States Revenue Service where you are and you're not likely to get where you can be much use to them—ever. Do you get me?"

"I get you," said Harding, quietly.

"Well, then, I guess you're where you'll listen to a little common sense, aren't you? We could use a clever youngster like you who has friends in high places. Here's the proposition—that is, if you're interested in hearing it."

"Go ahead," said Harding quietly.

Dane studied him thoughtfully for a moment. He thought he knew exactly what appeal to make.

"Well, I think you like my niece Dorothy. I don't want her to marry a poor man, and a smart young fellow like you needn't be a poor man if he has sense enough to keep in right with the revenue service and the boys who are backing it. Here's my proposition: We unite you and let you go. You go back and report to Martin that there's nothing doing.

"Account for your day of silence by saying you thought that if you broke all connections with New York and laid low you'd be likely to get on all the secrets of the place. Tell him there are no secrets—that everything's right as a trivet here. That way you keep in right with him and you can wise us up to it if he gets ready to send another inspector here. I'm offering you a chance to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. Will you take it?"

"And if I don't?"

An Overt Threat.

"If you don't, my boy, you'll never see Dorothy again. She's been moping around pretty sadly for the last few days. She thinks you're the kind of a city chap to kiss and ride away for something like that. She's mighty unhappy about you—and her faith in men is about gone.

"It's up to you whether you go to Davy Jones' locker and Dorothy goes moping throught life or whether you marry and live happy ever after. Which will it be?

"Must I decide this minute, Dane?" he asked.

"No—give you twenty-four hours to think it over. You'll be a little thirsty and a little hungry, but not eating or drinking will leave you entirely free for thinking," said Dane. "I'll show up tomorrow for my answer. Better think it over carefully, boy. You'll be a long time dead."

And Clinton Harding was left in the darkness of the cave to measure his own manhood.

The next morning Dane returned to the cave and with him came his two companions—the seafaring men. They stuck torches in the wall to light the cave, and when they had made their preparations they asked Harding for his answer.

Without bravado, almost without emotion, he gave it: "Dane, the moment I get out of here I go straight to John Martin with my information."

Dane studied him for a moment—and then accepted the answer. "Well, boys, as soon as it's dark we'll just drop him into the water with a rock to his feet. Men don't come back from the bottom of the sea to betray those who would have been their friends—if they'd been given half a chance.

And Jimmy Burton, peering in cautiously from the passageway which he had entered by means of the well rope, heard and smiled grimly to himself. Then he crept into the shadow of the cave and waited for the smugglers to go out and leave Harding to the contemplation of his fate. Presently they went out the farther entrance to set about dragging in more of their smuggled goods from the waterside.

The Peddler Speaks.

At once Jimmy crept round to Harding and cut the ropes which bound his hands. Even then the smugglers were heard returning, and Jimmy had only time for a hurried whisper. "Hang on to this knife and when they come for me take to the water."

Next he hurried over to the entrance of the cave and shouted tauntingly, "Didn't I say that watch told secrets?"

"It's that peddler!" shouted Dane. And on the word he and his men followed the taunting figure which hurried across the passageway to the bottom of the well and began swarming up the wall.

A moment later the men left the cave by two exits. Harding had freed himself and hurrying through the bushes he dived out into the water. In the same instant Jimmy got to the top of the well, picked up the shotgun he had left lying in the grass and leveled it over the curbing.

On this tableau John Martin, his assistants and I entered: Jimmy lying across the green award aiming his gun at three men of the seafaring type while a good-looking young man in corduroy adrip with salt water rushed over the grass from the top of the cliffs.

"Don't move. These things scatter awfully," commanded Jimmy, with a wry glance at his shotgun.

And the dripping young man managed to laugh in spite of his condition for he called cheerfully. "Better take this. That thing isn't loaded."

But Martin and his officers bore loaded guns and those intimidated the smugglers beyond all thought of a fight. The law took possession of them promptly.

From the cottage came a disconsolate little figure. "Oh, you aren't arresting uncle!" cried Dorothy Dane.

But life has its compensations as she learned at once, and not all men "Kiss and ride away." For she found a refuge in arms which were held out to enfold her and fend off thoughts of the doubtful uncertainities she had known during two long days of waiting and from the shame she must feel when her uncle came to trial.

No girl of a fishing village is ever afraid of salt water. And though he was fairly adrip with the waters of the Atlantic, Dorothy crept happily into Clinton Harding's arms, for that was the beginning of her story, and so it shall be the end of mine.

THE END.